

Ebenezer General Baptist Church

Brief historic record.*

IT would be impossible in a small handbook like the present, to insert anything like a full and detailed history of the Ebenezer Church. It is still styled *General* Baptist Church, the day not having yet quite arrived when the two branches of the one denomination shall respectfully blot out the now altogether obsolete terms *General* and *Particular*, and content themselves with being known as Baptists; taking thereby another step towards that broadened thought and completed charity, which will end all sectarian titles in the pride and joy of being Christians. The term "*General*" we said was now obsolete, representing no *real* distinction between ourselves and those Churches in the larger portion of the Baptist body. For historical purposes, however, the word has important uses, carrying us back in thought to heroic assertions of religious independence and noble sacrificial struggles in the cause of liberty, in the dark days of superstition and tyranny both in England and on the Continent, before what is known as the *Particular Baptist* denomination existed. "*General*" *Baptists*, it will be seen, existed before the "*Particulars*," although what is known as the New Connexion of General Baptists is the younger of the two sections now existing. The founder of the latter denomination, in these Northern Counties, was the Rev. Dan Taylor. We say he was the founder in the Northern districts, for it is significant that small groups of Churches holding similar views as to polity and doctrine, quite independently, sprang up about the same time in the Midlands, the East, and the North, which were afterwards united in one body known as the New Connexion of General Baptist Churches. The Rev. Dan Taylor was converted amongst the Methodists, but through change of religious views was led to sever himself from that body. His love of Christ and passion for souls would not suffer him to be idle, and it was not long before he gathered around him a few kindred souls, to whom he ministered, as pastor, in a hired house at Wadsworth. This was in the year 1762. In 1764, this new Church built a house for prayer, on the side of the rocky declivity, called Birchcliffe. It is to the zeal of the people worshipping in that sanctuary, that the Ebenezer Church owes its origin. In the year 1776, some of the members of that Church came to preach the gospel in the small village of Worsthorne. About the same time casual visits were paid by the Rev. Dan Taylor and others to Burnley. Here, they found ears more attentive and hearts more responsive to their message. Hence, the regular preaching place was changed to Burnley, and in the year 1780 a *Church* was formed; the first church, we believe, of this order, in the North, after Birchcliffe. In that same year the first pastor was ordained, there being a membership of 26. Name of the pastor was Mr. R. Foulds. On the occasion of the ordination, the Rev. Dan Taylor delivered the charge to the pastor, basing his discourse on

*From Lancashire Record Office.

Titus II, 7–8 verses; and the Rev. John Taylor gave counsel to the Church. By 1786 the cause was sufficiently established to induce the Church to contemplate the building of a Chapel. In the spring of 1787 ground was purchased, and the building commenced: the total cost was about £300, towards which, after the opening services, £90 had been raised, leaving the little society burdened with a debt of £210. It is interesting to read of the laborious and persevering efforts put forth to reduce this debt. Various parts of Yorkshire, Warwickshire, Lincolnshire, Huntingdonshire, Bucks, Kent, Somerset, and Devonshire, were induced by visitation or letter to yield contributions. Members of the Birchcliffe and Burnley Churches, when, travelling was so difficult, went as far south as Canterbury and Taunton to collect funds. One loss, however, the Church suffered as a consequence of this zeal; the Pastor visiting the Midlands, in their interests, and, as was inevitable, preaching the gospel to the people he visited, was invited to become the pastor of the Church at Longford, near Coventry, and ultimately accented the invitation. The next Minister was Mr. E. Whittaker, who entered upon the pastorate in 1789. In 1794, Mr. Foulds returned to his original charge, labouring here for 6 or 7 years longer, when he was succeeded by Mr. T. Walworth, in 1804. After Mr. Walworth's short pastorate it would seem the Church was three years without minister. In 1810, Mr. G. Dean became pastor, labouring with encouraging success until 1818. During this pastorate the premises were enlarged, by the purchase of a house, which was used for a schoolroom an[d] vestry. The next minister was Mr H. Aston, who continued in the pastorate earnestly seeking to build up the Church and extend the Kingdom of Christ amongst them, for 18 years. From 1838 to 1847 the Rev. T. Gill was pastor; He was succeeded by the Rev. J. Batey. It was during Mr. Batey's pastorate that the unfortunate discord arose which led to a permanent division and the establishment of the Enon Church, of which, Mr Batey shortly afterwards became pastor. In 1851, the Rev. T. Robertshaw undertook the pastorate, and laboured assiduously amidst the inevitable difficulties with much success, and being called away through death after a brief pastorate, left a memory which is still green and fragrant. The Rev. O. Hargreaves, in 1856, became pastor of the Church, numbering 123 members, having a Sunday School of 340 scholars and 40 teachers. During his pastorate the present Chapel was erected, and much good accomplished; he fell a victim to consumption and died in January, 1868, greatly lamented by the Church and congregation. The Rev. G. Needham was invited, and accepted the pastorate in Oct. of the same year. During his ministry much good was accomplished, and the present Day and Sunday Schools were erected at a cost of £3000. The Memorial Stone was laid on May 27th, 1871. The ministry of Mr. Needham terminated in 1876, after which, the Church was 18 months without pastor. The Rev. W. Reynolds was pastor for a short time, and the Church was again without pastor for a period of three years. In March, 1882, the present pastor (Rev. J. E. Barton) settled. The forces of the Church were again rallied and organized. The amount of success which has attended the present ministry, the awakening of thought, and zeal, and manifold enterprise are known by all familiar with the movements of the Church. There is now a membership of 412; the organizations are in a thoroughly healthy state, and the prospects of the Church brighter and surer than at any previous time.